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SUBJECT: EASTERN CHAD: ICRC UPDATE

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: ICRC estimates there are approximately 20,000 Chadians displaced along the border south of Adre by raids by Arabic-speaking nomads from both sides of the border. It has no evidence of direct Sudan government involvement but assumes complicity. The principal factor in ICRC's analysis is the absence of Chadian security forces. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Interim ICRC chief Walter Stocker called on Ambassador Wall March 15 to introduce incoming permanent chief Thomas Merkelbach; misoffs obtained more detail at a lunch for ICRC on March 16. Stocker said that conclusions drawn by Human Rights Watch and various media in recent reporting on violence in eastern Chad differed in significant respects from conclusions drawn by ICRC teams present and active every day on the scene.

¶3. (SBU) Stocker said that there had been, without question, a significant increase in violence since the Chadian security forces departed the area south of Adre in the wake of the attack on Adre in December. Some semi-permanent villages had been destroyed in the border zone, resulting in 12,000 displaced Chadians in the area of Madoyna and Koloy (mainly Dadjo ethnicity) and 7-10,000 in the area (somewhat further up the Wadi Kadja) of Goungour and Borota (mainly Masalit ethnicity).

¶4. (SBU) The Madoyna/Koloy area, Stocker said, had long been a troubled zone, because Chadian territory there extended across the Wadi Kadja, whereas upstream and downstream the border lay upon the Wadi Kadja itself. Some of the Dadjo people there had significant herds of cattle and were semi-nomadic. Previously, attacks on the Chadian population in this trans-Kadja zone had taken place mainly in the rainy season, when the river became difficult to cross and left that population undefended, but now, with the departure of the Chadian security forces, these people had become exposed in all seasons. In fact, Stocker said, there had been a major attack last September with 80 deaths, which had spurred the Chadian government to send in gendarmes to the area, but

they withdrew in December with the rest of the Chadian forces in the area. After this departure of security forces, the trans-Kadja population had begun to move out even before there were renewed raids, in anticipation of them. Stocker said that he did not wish to overemphasize the quality of Chadian security forces, when they had been present. They had often been guilty of intimidation and extortion of the local population, but they had nonetheless been a factor of dissuasion against raids.

15. (SBU) According to Stocker, the Goungour/Borota border zone included some 20 Masalit villages, and the pattern there followed the pattern further east in the trans-Kadja area: Some of the villages had been largely destroyed, some not. Many of the displaced persons, especially in Goungour/Borota, had only moved a few kilometers and were still able to get back to their farm plots during the day. Some had gone on to refugee camps in the region (southwest to Goz Beida or northwest to camps between Abeche and Adre). UNHCR, he said, was having difficulty distinguishing between Chadian Masalit and Sudanese Masalit, as it appeared that some Sudanese Masalit who had taken refuge on the Chadian side but not in camps (as they thereby could keep their cattle) were now coming to the camps due to increased instability on the border.

16. (SBU) UNHCR on March 14 had used the figure of 50,000 displaced persons from the two affected Chadian border areas, Stocker said, but that number was provided by district chiefs citing the entire population. ICRC held to its figure of approximately 20,000.

17. (SBU) Stocker said that the violence of the recent raids had been proportional to villagers' armed resistance. In those villages in which self-defense units had been established and fought back, as was true of a raid in the

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trans-Kadja area on March 6, there had been some significant casualties. One worrisome development was that some of these self-defense units appeared to be coordinating with Sudanese rebel forces. The Government of Sudan had claimed that an attack in Sudanese territory opposite Borota was an attack by Government of Chad forces, but more likely this had been an attack by Sudanese rebels supported by the Chadian self-defense groups. Such coordination would tend, Stocker noted, to expose these villages to retaliation from Sudanese Arab groups.

18. (SBU) Stocker said that there was a significant Arab presence around Misteri, across the Wadi Kadja in Darfur, as well as a Sudanese armed forces garrison there. However, Stocker said, the ICRC teams operating on the Chadian side had seen no evidence of direct involvement by Sudanese regular ground or air forces in attacks on Chadian villages. There was evidence of use of RPG's but there were no bomb craters.

19. (SBU) Stocker said that the present increased instability in the border area south of Adre had to be seen also in the larger context of the "serious pauperization" of the whole border area of eastern Chad by the influx of refugees and the conflict in Darfur. Refugees' demands on grazing areas, water, and firewood; the halt to cross-border commerce; and the shift of cattle migrating routes into Chad (involving increased straying of cattle onto cultivated land and increased cultivation of the narrow cattle corridors by agriculturalists) had all taken a heavy toll. Without a political solution to the conflict in Darfur, conflict in Chad "would self-ignite on a permanent basis."

110. (SBU) According to Stocker, the Arabic-speaking nomads launching these "mostly commercial raids" were to some extent from the Sudanese side but probably to some extent from the Chadian side, as there existed a significant nomadic Arabic-speaking population in Chad and the Oueddai Region

specifically. In the face of such attacks and because of the absence of security forces, and also because of the prospect of an "easier life" in refugee camps, some of the villagers had decided to take to the road and seek a place in refugee camps; if they did not get into camps in Chad, some would be likely to seek refuge in camps in Darfur. However, when ICRC personnel questioned these displaced persons, none of them, so far, had requested aid but only the necessary security to be able to go back to their villages. According to Stocker, WFP was beginning to preposition food stocks in the region to meet the eventuality of nonreturn of these people to their villages. There was no emergency at present, but a food problem would develop if the people did not plant their fields before the rainy season.

11. (SBU) As for the suggestion that genocidal extermination of populations was taking place in these two zones along the border, as suggested in recent media coverage, Stocker said there were no casualty figures to suggest the appropriateness of such terminology. The media had, for example, cited a hospital run by Medecins sans frontieres where casualties had "doubled" since the beginning of the year. The casualties did double there, but the total was 100, a small figure, and 50 percent of those were Sudanese rebels seeking treatment in Chad. The order of geographical scale of the two narrow areas of violence on the Chadian side of the border, and the order of scale of the areas of violence in Darfur, were in no way comparable. By the same token, security for international workers on the Chadian side remained far better than across the border in Darfur. However, Stocker emphasized, it was essential to monitor the Chadian border region very carefully, and ICRC would continue to do so.

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